

**Making it in America: Parental Language Retention, English
Proficiency, and Academic Aspirations among Immigrant Children**

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ABSTRACT: The larger share of immigrants in America today has important implications in American society. How immigrants can achieve their American dream and how they become integrated in American society remains unclear. What is clear is that these immigrants typically live in the lower rung of the socioeconomic ladder, but many come here so their children will have better opportunities and exceed them in socioeconomic status. Children's educational achievement and aspirations are essential for their success. It is for this reason that the determinants of educational aspirations are so important. I use data from the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS) to determine the relationship between parental language retention and educational aspirations. I include in my analyses three ethnic groups: Cubans, Filipinos, and Mexicans. The initial results reveal that speaking parental language at home increases children's college aspirations. However, this relationship is reversed when both peer and frequency of language use is taken into consideration. This relationship takes yet another turn as it is demonstrated that immigrant children are most likely to have college aspirations if they are able to speak parental language and are proficient in English. In contrast, immigrants who are proficient in English but are poor in parental language have lower level of college aspiration compared to the bilingual children. I discuss these general findings and some anomalies among ethnic groups using the theories of classical and segmented assimilation.

In recent years, there has been a drastic increase in the number of immigrants coming into the United States. According to the U.S. census, one in every five children has at least one foreign-born parent (US Census 2000). While previous waves of immigration were predominantly from European countries, newly arrived immigrants come mainly from Latin American and Asian countries. As is the case in times of high immigration, nativism has once again resurfaced across the United States. Many Americans believe that the high volume of immigrants will hinder, or even stop, immigrants' assimilation into mainstream society (US English 2005). The perceived low levels of human, financial, and social capital of these immigrants only aggravate this fear of assimilation not occurring. As a result of these beliefs, or along with long-lasting racial prejudice and discrimination, some people have sought out legislation to address the problems brought upon by the newly arrived immigrants. The most common types of this legislation revolve around language use (US English 2005).

Throughout United States history, immigrants have been confronted with a set of expectations. One of the most prominent of expectations is the acquisition and use of English on a daily basis. As Theodore Roosevelt clearly stated, "We have room for but one language here, and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans" (US English 2005). While he made this statement at a time of international war, his sentiment is still shared by many Americans today. English is equated with being an American. The logic here is that the United States has always been at the receiving end of waves of immigration. These early waves of immigration, coming predominantly from European countries, have come to accept

English as their language of choice. Therefore, it is argued that no accommodations, for a deviation in language, should be made for these newer waves.

The foundation for such a belief is that a common language leads to greater unity among people. After all, in order for compromises to be made, a channel of communication must first be established. Without the common ground of a familiar language, the ability to resolve the conflicts that arise is hindered. This is a problem given the emphasis placed on this country on the unity of its citizens. While the dynamics of language retention vary, it is facilitated by the geographic isolation of some groups. In some parts of the country, there is a higher concentration of some immigrant groups than in other regions. In these areas, a language other than English can be more of a mainstream phenomenon. Thus, outsiders that are visiting that particular region may feel like foreigners in their very own country. This inability to communicate may raise concerns about the compatibility of two distinct languages in reaching unity.

Similar thoughts of the incompatibility of two languages were shared among scholars early on (Bossard 1945). The growing consensus for decades was that bilingualism was detrimental to the immigrant children's development. The shift came with a revolutionary study conducted by Peal and Lambert in 1962. For the first time ever, it was shown that those children that were bilingual actually outperformed their monolingual counterparts (Peal and Lambert 1962). This was significant in its implications for the personal development of these children. The means by which they could achieve success suddenly expanded into previously uncharted territory. This expansion in possibilities can be tied directly to the benefits derived from bilingualism. They are not only able to reap the benefits of the host country, but derive benefits from

the continued nourishment of their heritage. This important source of social capital was lacking in their monolingual counterparts.

While there are many paths to success in this country, education is one of the prominent mechanisms by which individuals are able to move up the socioeconomic ladder. The availability of education enables anyone to pursue endeavors they see fit; the only constraints are derived from the individual, not society. If a child aspires to be a doctor or teacher, that dream can be attained through this country's education system. This is especially true for children of immigrants. Given their parents' little to no formal education, it becomes essential for them to attain the resources to succeed elsewhere. This gap in resources grows even more when the means to succeed are blocked because of prejudice and discrimination. The educational system compensates for some of this gap in resources. In embarking on an education, immigrant children fulfill one of the main reasons their parents sacrificed so much to come to the United States. Within education lies the means by which they are able to attain their very own American Dream. It is for this reason that the predictors of educational attainment are so important. As prior research has shown, educational aspirations are a crucial indicator of actual educational attainment (Sewelk and Heuser 1975).

The classical assimilation model entails newly arrived immigrants conforming to the expectations of the receiving country (Gordon 1963). It is argued that all immigrants undergo a number of changes as they spend more time living in the United States. In the long run, they leave all aspects of their previous lives behind in order to fully enjoy the benefits of their new life. Any trait immigrants maintain is thus regarded as detrimental to their development (Zhou 1997). Once all previous affiliation with their roots is lost, it

is assumed they will have equal access to all the resources available. The goal of such a society is to reach unity through universalism (Zhou 1997).

Segmented assimilation takes a different approach to assimilation (Portes and Hao 2002). Within this framework, some traits retained by the immigrant actually aid the transition to their new environment. While the end result is not uniformity throughout members of society, the immigrant population may be better off. These unique traits are thus “utilized as a distinct form of social capital that contributes to adaptation” (Zhou 1997:73). This point is exemplified when one considers the fact that immigrants have a choice as to what not only to bring with them, but what to take from the host culture (Zhou 1997). It’s also possible that some characteristic is consistent across cultures, which would mean that no conflict would exist in the first place. While we tend to focus on the differences among people, it is the similarities that are oftentimes overlooked. It is these similarities that provide the foundation for immigrants to shape their livelihood as they see fit. They bring with them what they think they can use, and constantly interact with the host country to create a new self (Zhou 1997).

While these two approaches appear to be at complete opposite ends of the spectrum, they both offer key insights into the adaptation process of immigrants. That is, it is important to realize the impact of both the receiving country and the impact of the immigrant’s heritage on their children. One factor that tends to exhibit conflict between immigrants and the receiving country is language. In the US, English is considered to be essential to the success of everyone. Nonetheless, in a country where English is a precursor for success, what role does a foreign language brought to America by immigrants play?

This paper seeks to analyze the relationship between parental language retention and educational aspirations among children of immigrants. How does speaking a non-English at home affect educational aspirations? How about speaking that same language with peers? Is the relationship absolute, or does frequency of language use play a role? As proficiency in English increases, what happens to educational aspirations? What about proficiency in a non-English language? Finally, how does proficiency in both languages impact educational aspirations? All of these questions will be addressed in this paper. The results will be analyzed using two conflicting theories: selective acculturation and full assimilation. Within this framework, it is hoped that a greater understanding of the importance of parental language retention, for those immigrant children born in the US (2nd generation) and those brought to the US before age 12 (1.5 generation), is achieved.

Literature Review

English proficiency has been cited as one of the most influential factors in order to succeed in the United States (Zhou, 1997). As Zhou states, “lack of English proficiency...has been a severe handicap for immigrants and their children” (Zhou 1997:87). This stems from the fact that almost everything in this country is conducted in English. This is especially true for our education system. While there are bilingual programs across the country, there has always been a stronger emphasis on English in the curriculum. This means that any person with little to no proficiency in the language can feel lost or alienated in our education system. If there is a sense of not belonging in our school systems, the student may come to the conclusion that they won’t get very far.

This sense of hopelessness by the student would be detrimental to both academic aspirations and consequently, actual educational attainment.

In the first-half of the 1900s, most scholars believed that the attempt to master two languages would be detrimental to the individual (Bossard 1945). According to Bossard, “language is both part and symbol of a culture, reflecting its essence in such a way that another language cannot serve as a substitute” (Bossard 1945). This suggests that there is an inherent force, within language use, which drives the individual to succeed within that particular culture. He went further to suggest that learning two languages would put a strain on the child because he or she would have to work twice as hard (Bossard 1945). His research was drawn from 17 case studies from interviews, self-surveys, and previous publications.

Similar results could be found throughout the academic arena until 1962. The turning point came with Peal and Lambert’s truly revolutionary analysis of bilingualism (Peal and Lambert 1962). Based on a sample of French-Canadian children, they determined that fluent bilinguals actually outperformed their monolingual counterparts. Their results differed from previous research for two key reasons. The first was that it controlled for social class. Those in the upper classes, regardless of language orientation, have access to greater financial resources, so it is a factor that cannot be ignored. Second, it acknowledged the wide range of possibilities surrounding language use. The comparisons no longer revolved around English monolinguals and foreign monolinguals. Fluent bilinguals were separated from limited bilinguals, English monolinguals, and foreign monolinguals (Peal and Lambert 1962).

This high achievement of fluent bilinguals can be attributed to their sustained relationship with their parents and their culture (Portes 2002). Fluent bilinguals have the benefit of receiving the best from both worlds. The ties that are maintained with their parents' culture enable them to tap into a type of social capital that encourages advancement (Portes 2002). Their parents care about them and invest in them as many resources as they are capable of doing so. Likewise, their strong command of English enables them to actively participate in the host society. Here too do they reap the benefits accorded with English proficiency. This is not the case for limited bilinguals or English monolinguals. Their ties to the past have been severely severed or are non-existent. Portes attributes limited bilingualism to school programs that attempt to submerge students into English-only at a precipitated pace (Portes 2002). The end result of such programs is "rapid loss of the mother tongue without full acquisition of the new language (Portes 2002:892).

Not everyone benefits from bilingualism though. Zhou points out that language use must be analyzed by taking contextual factors into consideration (Zhou 1997). She points out that the positive effects of bilingualism appears to diminish as time in the United States increases (Zhou 1997). This may be a result of individuals choosing English over their other language as time progresses. Likewise, the continued use of Spanish among Chicanos has been shown to negatively impact academic achievement (Zhou 1997). This highlights the importance of residential segregation among the newly arrived immigrant groups. While Spanish may be all that is needed to survive in some particular area, the individual is at a disadvantage once that situational factor is non-existent. This assumes that English is being replaced by Spanish, not that there is a

constant interaction among both languages. She does point out that these anomalies seem to be constrained to Hispanics (Zhou 1997).

Another important precursor to the positive effects of bilingualism deals with language spoken at home. In order to explain this relationship, Mouw and Xie offer the transitional perspective on bilingualism. They argue that there is no absolute cause and effect relationship between bilingualism and achievement (Mouw and Xie 1999). Rather, they are contingent around children maintaining communication with their parents. Thus, they contend that the parental language does not “promote ethnic identity, facilitate access to cultural capital, or enhances cognitive development” (Mouw and Xie 1999). Bilingualism retains its benefits when the children’s parents have little to no knowledge of English (Mouw and Xie 1999). Once the parents reach a higher level of English proficiency, the utility of the foreign language is minimized (Mouw and Xie 1999).

Some historical facts can play a role in the impact of parental language on academic aspirations. Mexicans are among the youngest of the Hispanic population in this country. On the other end of the spectrum are Cubans, the oldest of this group. This prolonged stay in the US could inhibit the utility of a foreign language for the Cuban sample. The widespread use of English in the Philippines may play a factor into the impact of parental language for this group as well. Their parents are more likely to know English than the Hispanic sample, especially Mexicans. All these factors must be considered when the educational aspirations of these three groups are taken into account.

Ogbu’s dichotomy of involuntary and voluntary minorities does a good job in providing some insights to the differences among the ethnic groups discussed in this study (Ogbu 1983). He believed that a student’s point of reference determined to a large

degree their perception of success in the future. Those that were considered voluntary minorities would have a reference group outside of the United States, so they would be much more optimistic about their future (Ogbu 1983). Involuntary minorities would be more pessimistic because their point of reference was in subordination to the White population (Ogbu 1983). This comparison is helpful, but the introduction of immigrant groups requires further inquiry.

The educational aspirations of immigrant children have sources that are both similar and unique to their native counterparts. One approach emphasizes the importance of the social capital provided by parents to their children. As the parent-child bond is strengthened, the opportunities and support provide encouragement to the child (Hao and Bonstead-Bruns, 1998). Likewise, the solidarity within immigrant communities is viewed as a positive phenomenon.

The second approach puts an emphasis on the interaction of family and institutions in their communities (Hao and Bonstead-Bruns, 1998). In this case, this solidarity is viewed as a detrimental to the development of children. If some immigrant children find themselves in a disadvantaged neighborhood, they will “have little contact with close, intimate role models from their family, extended family, or the community and have little knowledge of how a person achieves success and how schoolwork is connected to future success” (Hao and Bonstead-Bruns, 1998:178). This means that the only exposure the children will have is to individuals that are only equipped in functioning in their microcosm of society. This is problematic because when these children make it out into society, they would have had inadequate preparation to succeed in such an environment.

Given this information, the following three hypotheses have been developed:

1. Parental language retention will have a positive effect of educational aspirations.
2. English proficiency will be positively related with an increase in educational aspirations.
3. Thus, parental language retention and English proficiency will lead to higher educational aspirations

Data and Methods

This paper uses data from the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS). This data sought to establish the means by which second generation immigrants adapt to life in the United States. The second generation is defined as those with at least one foreign-born parent. The 1.5 generation is defined as those born outside of the US, but who came to the United States before the age of 12. The sample consisted of 7th and 8th graders residing in San Diego, CA and Miami/Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. While the original respondents were made up of 77 nationalities, only 3 were used in this research. The sample size was 5,262, but the sample is representative of the larger ethnic groups in the area. The three groups that were chosen were: Cubans, Filipinos, and Mexicans.

English proficiency is measured among the respondents by asking them a series of questions. These questions sought to establish the respondents' ability to read, write, understand, and speak English. For each of the four measures, they were asked to rate their proficiency on a four-point scale. The four possible answers were: "Very little," "Not well," "Well," and "Very well." A similar format was established to determine

proficiency in their respective parental language. One of the drawbacks of self-reports, pertaining to language use, is that subjective interpretations of language ability do not always coincide with objective measures. As Espenshade and Fu point out, perceived “proficiency may be colored by the immigrant’s native language, by social attitudes towards language use, or by discrepant notions of what it means to be able to speak another language well” (Espenshade and Fu, 1997:293). Nonetheless, self-reports are commonly used by many respectable agencies, including the U.S. Census.

In order to gauge academic aspirations, respondents were asked what the highest level of education they hoped to achieve in their lifetime was. There were five possible choices: “Less than high school,” “Finish high school,” “Some college,” “Finish college,” and “Finish a graduate degree.” These five choices capture the critical steps of educational progression. Each of these checkpoints is significant in that it heavily influences occupation and therefore socioeconomic status.

To determine the extent of parental language retention, respondents were asked whether or not they used a non-English language in two different settings. The first was whether or not a language other than English was used at home. The second setting was centered on whether or not a language other than English was used with peers. This first question was used to simply establish the language patterns of the respondents in both situations. The second question was far more concrete. To determine home language use, they were asked how often people that live in their house use this language to communicate. They were also asked how often that language was spoken with peers. In both cases, they could choose from “Seldom,” “From time to time,” “Often,” and “Always.” To make the distinctions far more meaningful, the four categories were

condensed into two. The first one, hereafter “Not always,” encompassed the original “Seldom” and “From time to time” responses. The second, “Always” encompassed the original “Often” and “Always” categories. This was done to highlight the exclusivity of the “Always” category. The implications of this distinction will be discussed later.

The measure of bilingualism was achieved by combining both the measure of English proficiency and that of parental language. They were combined so that four different gradations would arise: limited bilingual, English monolingual, foreign monolingual, and fluent bilingual. Those in the “limited bilingual” category are those that exhibit little to no command of both English and their respective foreign language. Those in the “English monolingual” category are those that have shown a strong proficiency in English, but lack such high proficiency in their foreign language. “Foreign monolinguals” are just the opposite of English monolinguals. They exhibit a strong proficiency in a foreign language, but have little to no command of English. Finally, there are the “fluent bilinguals.” These individuals exhibit a strong command of both English and a foreign language.

Results

Table 1 shows the relationship between parental language retention at home and academic aspirations. Those respondents who spoke non-English at home show higher aspirations than those who did not. Specifically, 90.4% of respondents where a non-English language is spoken at home aspire to at the very least finish college. This is significantly higher than the 82.3% of those where English is spoken at home. This result was consistent with both Mexicans and Filipinos, but not Cubans. The Cuban sample had

higher aspirations if they spoke English at home as opposed to another language. The relationship between parental language retention and academic aspirations is consistent with all ethnicities when frequency is discussed. Those respondents that “Always” spoke a foreign language at home had lower college aspirations than those that did not. 88.1% of the “Always” respondents aspired to attend college, which was lower than the 92% of those that did not always speak a foreign language at home.

When comparing the educational aspirations of respondents that spoke a foreign language at home, two points come across. The first is that speaking a non-English at home is not inherently detrimental towards academic aspirations for both Mexicans and Filipinos. The higher aspirations of the non-English group support this idea. As for the Cuban anomaly, as one of the oldest group of immigrants, it is possible that the reliance of English by parents is higher. All three groups support the notion of language being the means by which a bond to family is retained (Portes 2002). Since some parents are unable to speak English, using a foreign language is the only means by which children and parents can communicate. The only difference is that the Cuban sample relies more on English than the other two groups. This result for the Cuban sample is therefore consistent with the notion of the utility of a foreign language diminishing as proficiency in English among parents increases (Mouw and Xie 1999). Finally, the results from the Mexican and Filipino sample are consistent with my hypothesis, while the Cuban sample contested it.

Frequency of a foreign language being used at home plays a critical role in educational aspirations as well. Those respondents that reported “always” speaking a foreign language at home showed lower aspirations than those that did not. Only 88.1%

of those that “always” spoke a foreign language aspired to college, as opposed to 92.6 of those that did not. This result was consistent across all ethnic groups. For Filipinos, the difference across both groups was only about 1%. For both Cubans and Mexicans, this difference was larger. In the Mexican sample, of those that “always” spoke a non-English language at home aspired for college only 77% of the time, as opposed to 83% of those that didn’t do so.

It may be possible to understand this anomaly in language frequency use by identifying who these individuals are. Those respondents that “always” spoke a foreign language at home live in an environment where English proficiency is minimal or null. In the preceding example, the possibility of having a sibling that spoke English was present. Nonetheless, this isn’t the case in the household where a foreign language is “always” used. Thus, it is possible that the lowered aspirations are a result of the inability of the family to cope with the demands of the outside world. This result also highlights the risk that some immigrants encounter by conducting everything in a foreign language. As Zhou points out, English proficiency is an important precursor to success in this country (Zhou 1997).

This table also shows the cross tabulations between parental language retention with peers and academic aspirations. Of those that spoke only English with their peers, 93.2% hoped to attend college. Of those that spoke a foreign language with peers, only 89% had similar aspirations. This particular relationship was not consistent across ethnicities. While both Filipinos and Cubans exhibited this general trend, Mexicans did not. On the other hand, there was consensus when frequency was taken into account. Those that always spoke a foreign language with peers had lower aspirations than those

that didn't. Of those that did not always use a foreign language with peers, 93.9% sought to attain a college education. Only 85% of those that exclusively spoke a foreign language with peers had similar aspirations. In both simple language use and frequency, the Mexican sample experienced the greatest divergence among categories. For example, while both Cubans and Filipinos only differed by about 1% in both cases, Mexicans experienced a difference of at least 5%. This difference is even more noticeable when frequency is taken into account: those that always spoke a non-English language with peers aspired to a graduate education at only 77%, while those that did not were at 87.2%.

The general trend is that non-English language is used with peers tends to lower aspirations. Similar to language use at home, this relationship is strengthened when frequency of language use is taken into account. It is possible that those respondents that "always" speak a foreign language with peers are part of a subculture where the point of reference is not as high. This becomes an increasing possibility because children are not able to choose their family, but they are able to choose their friends. The exclusivity of the group that "always" speaks a foreign language reveals a personal preference by the respondents. They choose to be around those individuals that only use a foreign language. Likewise, this non-English language use may indicate the nature of the discussions among the youth. These discussions may revolve around other topics beyond school work; most school-work in this country is conducted in English. Those respondents that find themselves entirely in a non-English environment lack the means by which to succeed in school. After all, they do not learn the importance of schooling for their futures (Hao and Bonstead-Bruns, 1998).

Table 1: Language Spoken at Home and With Peers

	Total (n)	No College	College Aspirations
Language spoken at home (%)			
English			
<i>Filipino</i>	33	15.2	84.8
<i>Mexican</i>	13	46.2	53.8
<i>Cuban</i>	22	4.5	95.5
<i>Total</i>	68	17.6	82.3
Non-English			
<i>Filipino</i>	748	4.7	95.3
<i>Mexican</i>	669	19.9	80.1
<i>Cuban</i>	1058	6.7	93.3
<i>Total</i>	2475	9.6	90.4
Frequency of non-English language use at home (%)			
Always			
<i>Filipino</i>	289	5.5	94.5
<i>Mexican</i>	396	22.3	77.7
<i>Cuban</i>	581	8.1	91.9
<i>Total</i>	1266	11.9	88.1
Not Always			
<i>Filipino</i>	454	4.2	95.8
<i>Mexican</i>	261	16.8	83.2
<i>Cuban</i>	487	5.3	94.7
<i>Total</i>	1202	7.4	92.6
Language spoken with peers (%)			
English			
<i>Filipino</i>	369	5.1	94.9
<i>Mexican</i>	66	15.2	84.8
<i>Cuban</i>	174	7.5	92.5
<i>Total</i>	609	6.9	93.1
Non-English			
<i>Filipino</i>	287	4.5	95.5
<i>Mexican</i>	606	20.8	79.2
<i>Cuban</i>	918	6.7	93.3
<i>Total</i>	1811	11.1	88.9
Frequency of non-English language use with peers (%)			
Always			
<i>Filipino</i>	55	5.5	94.5
<i>Mexican</i>	256	24.3	75.7
<i>Cuban</i>	267	8.2	91.8
<i>Total</i>	578	15	85
Not Always			
<i>Filipino</i>	90	3.3	96.7
<i>Mexican</i>	47	12.8	87.2
<i>Cuban</i>	645	6.2	94
<i>Total</i>	782	6.1	93.9

English proficiency appears to be positively related to academic aspirations. Those that reported having a “low” proficiency in English aspired to attain a college education only 81.9% of the time. This proportion was significantly less than those with a “high” proficiency in English; 93.2% of this group sought to attain a similar academic level. For Mexicans, there was a significant group of respondents in the “low” category that had aspirations comparable to those of “high” proficiency. 80.3% of these respondents reported wanting to attain a college education. Those in the “high” English proficiency category had only 84.3 seeking a similar goal.

As previous research has shown, English proficiency does in fact increase educational aspirations (Portes 2002). While immigrants have the ability to pick and choose, English should definitely be at the top of their list. A strong command of English allows individuals to fully immerse themselves in this society. This would also coincide with nativist agendas that stress “English only” throughout the country. The Mexican anomaly can be explained by noting that most of these individuals may be recent arrivals to the U.S. Unlike those that were born here or have been in this country a long time, they may be unaware of the structural constraints to attaining an education. The recent arrivals’ points of reference rest with those in their native country. This is similar to the approach taken by voluntary minorities (Ogbu 1983). It is for this reason that they are overly optimistic in regards to their aspirations in the new country.

Proficiency in parental language offers positive results in relation to academic aspirations. Those with “average” foreign language proficiency have the highest proportion of individuals seeking to attend college: roughly 90.8%. They are followed by those that have a “high” proficiency and finally by those with a “low” proficiency. This

general trend holds true for all ethnic groups. In this analysis, the greatest impact of parental language proficiency is on Mexicans. They jump from 75% of respondents aspiring to college to 88.8% at “average” proficiency.

This positive relationship in parental language proficiency is consistent with prior research (Portes 2002; Zhou 1997). Since English is essential to feel connected in U.S. society, so too is parental language retention critical to the maintenance of a bond with parents and the community. Those children that are proficient in a foreign language are able to reach a special kind of social capital (Portes 2002). This is especially true in areas in which there are high concentrations of immigrant populations. This may account for the increased utility of a foreign language for Mexicans. The sample from this study came from an area where these groups make a larger proportion of the population. These results are consistent with the notion of a common language being the means by which to maintain a bond with parents (Mouw and Xie 1999).

The results on bilingualism are mixed for all ethnicities as well. The highest educational aspirations could be found with those that are English monolinguals. 93.5% of this particular group aspired to attain a college education. All others were in the following descending order: fluent bilinguals, limited bilinguals, and foreign monolinguals. They made up 92.8%, 83.9%, and 82.8% respectively. This result reflects English monolinguals being a much higher proportion of the overall sample. When ethnicity is brought into the equation, there are some divergent paths. Mexicans had higher aspirations if they were fluent bilinguals. 88.2% of those that were fluent bilinguals sought a college education, compared to only 83.3% of English monolinguals.

The lowest aspirations could be found among the limited bilinguals. For this group, only 72.4% of them aspired to attain a college education.

Cubans had both similarities and differences relative to the Mexican sample. For this group, fluent bilinguals were at the top of college aspirations as well. The difference between both the fluent bilinguals and English monolinguals was negligible relative to the Mexican sample; 94.9% and 94.8%. Limited bilinguals came in a close third at 89.7% of them aspiring for a college education. The most noticeable decline in aspirations comes from the foreign monolingual group. In this particular category, only 68.2% of these individuals aspired to reach a college education.

Filipinos followed a path all of their own. Filipinos had higher aspirations if they were English monolinguals. From this group, 95.8% of them aspired to attain a college education. They were followed by: foreign monolingual, fluent bilinguals, and limited bilingual. The proportion of college aspirees was: 95.3%, 95%, and 92.4 respectively. Like the Cuban sample, the differences among the four groups were not as profound as the Mexican sample. Nonetheless, limited bilinguals did exhibit a significant drop relative to the other three categories.

Table 2: Proficiency in Languages

	Total (n)	No College	College Aspirations
Proficiency in English (%)			
Low			
<i>Filipino</i>	16	12.5	87.5
<i>Mexican</i>	89	19.1	80.9
<i>Cuban</i>	6	16.7	83.3
<i>Total</i>	111	18	82
Average			
<i>Filipino</i>	182	6	94
<i>Mexican</i>	309	25.2	74.8
<i>Cuban</i>	266	11.6	88.4
<i>Total</i>	757	15.8	84.2
High			
<i>Filipino</i>	584	5.1	94.9
<i>Mexican</i>	280	15.7	84.3
<i>Cuban</i>	821	5.1	94.9
<i>Total</i>	1685	6.9	93.1
Proficiency in parental language (%)			
Low			
<i>Filipino</i>	460	5.2	94.8
<i>Mexican</i>	150	24.6	75.4
<i>Cuban</i>	326	9.8	90.2
<i>Total</i>	936	9.9	90.1
Average			
<i>Filipino</i>	127	3.9	96.1
<i>Mexican</i>	273	21.2	88.8
<i>Cuban</i>	588	4.7	95.3
<i>Total</i>	988	9.2	90.8
High			
<i>Filipino</i>	63	4.8	95.2
<i>Mexican</i>	247	16.6	83.4
<i>Cuban</i>	175	7.4	92.6
<i>Total</i>	485	11.7	88.3
Proficiency in both languages (%)			
Fluent bilingual			
<i>Filipino</i>	20	5	95
<i>Mexican</i>	85	11.8	88.2
<i>Cuban</i>	157	5.1	94.9
<i>Total</i>	262	7.3	92.7
English monolingual			
<i>Filipino</i>	455	4.2	95.8
<i>Mexican</i>	191	16.7	83.3
<i>Cuban</i>	659	5.2	94.8
<i>Total</i>	1305	6.5	93.5
Foreign monolingual			
<i>Filipino</i>	43	4.7	95.3
<i>Mexican</i>	162	19.1	80.9
<i>Cuban</i>	16	31.3	68.2
<i>Total</i>	221	17.2	82.8
Limited Bilingual			
<i>Filipino</i>	131	7.6	92.4
<i>Mexican</i>	228	27.6	72.4
<i>Cuban</i>	254	10.3	89.7
<i>Total</i>	613	16.2	83.8

When analyzing the relationship between parental language retention and English, I find that fluent bilinguals have the highest aspirations than all other groups when talking about Cubans and Mexicans. This is consistent with bilinguals being able to fully enjoy the benefits of mainstream society and that of their parents' heritage (Portes 2002). For Filipinos, the utility of being an English monolingual can be attributed to the frequency of English-use in the Philippines. These three differing results are all explained by the notion of a foreign language maintaining its utility only when the parents of the children can't speak English. For both Mexicans and Cubans, the language spoken by parents is still Spanish. Nonetheless, there appears to be a divergence in the horizon. As one of the oldest Latino groups, the utility of Spanish is diminishing for Cubans as English enters the household. The small difference among fluent bilinguals and English monolinguals, relative to the divergence in the Mexican sample, supports this assertion. For Filipinos, that shift towards a decrease in utility of a foreign language has occurred.

Conclusion

The importance placed on education in this country is not without merit. Throughout generations, education has been a mechanism by which children are able to surpass their parents in socioeconomic status. In some cases, this movement in SES may not make too much of a difference, but in others it does. One example in which this movement is of utter importance is with children of immigrants. Most immigrant parents not only find themselves in the lower sectors of socioeconomic status, but have received insufficient schooling in their home countries. Thus, other means of attaining a higher

SES are necessary for their children. The utilization of education, to achieve their American dream, is one such means to an end.

In this study, I have examined the relationship between parental language retention and academic aspirations among children of immigrants. My findings demonstrate that segmented assimilation does a better job at explaining aspirations among children of immigrants than does the classical assimilation model. Segmented assimilation entails immigrants taking upon some aspects of the receiving country, but retaining some aspects of their heritage. The end result of such a combination is an individual who is well equipped with the means by which to succeed in their new environment. This utility of both languages is exactly what I see in this study. This is exemplified by the importance of not only English, but the retention of their parents' language.

The overall findings suggest that parental language retention is important for educational aspirations. While the data on language spoken at home and with peers seems to contradict this proposition, an alternative interpretation may be more plausible. Those respondents that "always" speak a non-English language at home may not have the practical resources for success in school that others may have. These "practical" resources revolve around receiving help in schoolwork or even parental involvement in school. The degree of parental language retention's influence may be different across groups, but it is still there. At the same time, the utility of English should not be understated. In a country where English is spoken by a large proportion of the population, it becomes necessary to learn if one is to succeed. Selective acculturation does a good job in accounting for these results. While it is essential for children to retain

that connection to their heritage, it is essential for them to take on key aspects of the host country. This is consistent with the positive effects of both parental language retention and English proficiency among the respondents.

The policy implications of this study are profound. The first acknowledgment that must be made is that these waves of immigration are more diverse than previous waves. Therefore, the path towards academic achievement will vary across ethnic groups. Those that find themselves in disadvantaged settings fare better when they maintain an attachment to their heritage, while those of higher SES benefit from further assimilation (Zhou 1997). Given these two scenarios, the nativist agenda of groups like US English is troubling. While those individuals with higher SES would probably benefit, all others would fall victim to the system.

While their approach may be flawed, the utility of English has not been contested by this study. Rather, it has been highlighted throughout. In a country where everything is conducted in English, its acquisition becomes imperative to be an active participant in society. Nonetheless, this study has also highlighted the utility of children maintaining their parents' language. The question then becomes by what means will children of immigrants be able to attain the maximum level of academic success. One possible means is a highly controversial program practiced in many schools across this nation: bilingual education.

Bilingual education is designed to ease the transition into schooling for those students whose English is a second language. This is accomplished by conducting classes in both English and another language. Their parents' language is used as a means to achieve familiarity in a newfound setting. English is then introduced in a gradual

manner until a certain level of proficiency is increased. The length that a student remains in bilingual education varies from case to case. The alternative is to submerge children into an English-only environment from the onset of their academic careers. As Portes points out, it is this type of environment that leads to deficiencies in both English and parents' language (Portes 2002). The results from both approaches are astronomically different. On one end, we have children that are deficient in both languages. On the other, the end result is a student that is proficient in both their parents' native language and English. As this study has shown, it is these individuals that have the highest aspirations.

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